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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Secretary Rice to Israel, West Bank Feb. 6-7

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Key stories in the media:

All media reported on the arrival of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in Israel on Sunday afternoon (banners in all major media, except Maariv). All media reported that at private and official meetings, Secretary Rice urged Israel to take steps to strengthen the new Palestinian Authority leadership. Banner in Ha'aretz (Hebrew Ed.): "Rice: Strengthen Abu Mazen, So That Opportunity Should Not Be Missed." The media reported that Secretary Rice concurred with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon that progress in the diplomatic process would depend on real Palestinian action against terror. She was quoted as saying that terror is the main long-term threat to the process, and that the Palestinians cannot be allowed to "switch on and switch off." The media quoted Secretary Rice as saying that Israel should not surprise PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) with unilateral actions in Jerusalem. Jerusalem Post quoted an Israeli official as saying that Rice was making clear that there are limits to the types of action the U.S. wanted to see Israel take, and that it was also clear that Israel did not intend "pushing those limits." Jerusalem Post quoted an official as saying that at the dinner at Sharon's residence, Rice made clear that the U.S. understands that one election does not make a democracy, and that the U.S. will remain focused on pressuring the PA to both institute reform and tackle terrorism. Rice was quoted as saying that she welcomes the Sharm el-Sheikh summit meeting.

Yediot bannered Secretary Rice's declaration that Israel will have to make further "hard decisions."

Last night, Secretary Rice granted interviews to three Israeli TV stations -- Israel TV, Channel 2-TV, and Channel 10-TV.

Yediot and other media reported that in understandings between top Sharon aide Dov Weisglass and PA security official Muhammad Dahlan, the sides decided that the status of 350 Palestinians wanted by Israel would be "frozen." This morning, Israel Radio quoted Dahlan as saying that the sides will debate the release of veteran, ill, and female prisoners immediately after the summit. Leading media quoted Sharon as saying that the release of the PFLP leaders who planned the assassination of tourism minister Rehavam Zeevi is not on the agenda.

This morning, Israel Radio reported that Fatah is prepared to expand the cease-fire with Israel into a comprehensive and mutual one. Ha'aretz noted encouraging signs in relations with the Palestinians, including concerted efforts by Hamas in Israeli prisons to achieve a new hudna (truce). Leading media reported that Syrian President Bashar Assad welcomed the summit. Maariv reported in its lead story that Arab sources have informed Abbas that Hizbullah could assassinate him.

Israel Radio reported that security sources have arrested a female Islamic Jihad activist from a village near Jenin who was about to carry out a suicide bombing and a Hamas militant from a village near Nablus who planned a suicide attack.

This morning, Israel Radio reported that Egyptian sources have accused Israel of postponing until a later date a ceremony to mark the deployment of Egyptian forces along the "Philadelphi route" (along the Gaza-Egypt border), originally scheduled for this coming Thursday, February 10th. Jerusalem Post reported that on Sunday, that the GOI ratified a three-way agreement among Egypt, Israel and the U.S. creating three Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZs) on Egyptian territory.

Ha'aretz reported that an ad hoc coalition representing 20 Palestinian and Israeli women's groups has written to Secretary Rice, calling on her to use her good offices to bring women into the peacemaking process so as to advance coexistence in the region. Ha'aretz cited the U.S. Embassy in Israel as saying that it welcomed the women's initiative.

Ha'aretz reported that the state prosecution plans to inform Israel's High Court of Justice that the opinion rendered by the International Court of Justice at The Hague on the West Bank separation fence is irrelevant. The prosecution will say the ruling was based on partial, outdated information and should therefore be disregarded.

Tel Aviv University's Peace Index poll conducted among Israeli Jews on January 31-February 1:
-77 percent support negotiations with the Palestinians;
31 percent believe they will lead to peace in the next few years.
-46 percent believe there is a significant chance of civil war erupting in Israel; 46 percent believe there is little chance of such a development; 5 percent are undecided.

Secretary Rice to Israel, West Bank Feb. 6-7:

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Summary:

Chief Economic Editor and senior columnist Sever Plotker wrote in the lead editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The Americans are not making light of the Sharm el-Sheikh summit; they are here, and more than ever before."

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote on page one of independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Something strange is going on: the government of Ariel Sharon prefers Egyptian involvement to American arbitration."

Diplomatic correspondent Shimon Shiffer wrote on page one of Yediot Aharonot: "'We will not release the murderers of Israelis, period,' said Ariel Sharon. 'I am not going to Sharm el-Sheikh to hold negotiations on that issue.'"

Arab affairs correspondent Jackie Hoogie wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "Success in the Israel-Palestinian track could release much of the American pressure upon [Egypt]."

Security and intelligence affairs commentator Amit Cohen wrote in Maariv: "All [the Palestinian organizations] have a shared goal: to keep their weapons and their military capability. They hope that the understandings reached with the Palestinian Authority in Gaza will allow them to do so despite the summit in Egypt."

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in Ha'aretz: "Israel and the Palestinians do not need another such incremental plan [as the Tenet and Mitchell documents], but rather a precise political definition of Sharon's declaration that Israel cannot continue to occupy the Palestinians and that there should be two states for the two peoples."

Former editor-in-chief Moshe Ishon wrote in nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe: "The Sharm el-Sheikh summit is rather a vision that will serve external interests --- first of all, those of ... Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak ... and ... of the Jordanian King."

Block Quotes:

I. "The Americans Are Here"

Chief Economic Editor and senior columnist Sever Plotker wrote in the lead editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (February 7): "Although U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is touring the Middle East, she does not intend to take part in the Israeli-Palestinian-Egyptian-Jordanian summit that is convening tomorrow at Sharm el-Sheikh. The distance that the United States is keeping from the Sharm el-Sheikh summit could create a mistaken impression of indifference. This is a misjudgment: the success of negotiations between Sharon and Abu Mazen is the supreme strategic interest of the U.S. in the region. For the first time since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, it is now controlled by a distinctly pro-American leadership group.... Abu Mazen and his associates ... are perceived as statesmen who are worthy of their people, known and appreciated by the White House. From this standpoint, Sharon's government has lost its exclusive hold over the U.S. administration's sympathy, a loss that already echoed in Rice's statements last night. The positive American overture towards the post-Arafat Palestinians appears to the White House as a bridge to the heart of the Arab world and a lever to reconciliation with Europe. For all these reasons, the ostensible indifference that the Bush administration is displaying towards the Sharm el-Sheikh summit is no more than a tactic stemming from being overly involved rather than insufficiently involved. The Americans are not making light of the Sharm el-Sheikh summit; they are here, and more than ever before."

II. "Israel Braces For Rice's Visit"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote on page one of independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (February 6): "Something strange is going on: the government of Ariel Sharon prefers Egyptian involvement to American arbitration -- that same administration the Prime Minister described as very friendly to Israel? Hosni Mubarak is applauded and the news that Rice is arriving is received with sour looks? Rice is seeking to show her presence and take command in the diplomatic arena. It is important for her to show to her colleagues in Europe that the new Bush administration intends to step up its involvement in finding a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.... In Israel there is displeasure at its role as a pawn in the game of the major powers. But this is not what really bothers the Prime Minister's Office. It is more concerned about an American attempt to mediate between Israel and the PA, and it would prefer it if Rice and her aides were kept out of the negotiations.... In Israel there is concern that an American mediator will assist Abbas beyond the level at which Sharon is comfortable with, and by this weaken the Israeli position.... The Sharm el-Sheikh summit is an opportunity for a time-out for all sides. It will enable the Americans to show that there is diplomatic movement, without having to participate. This will enable them to retain their status as an honest broker. As for the tough issues, they will be left for the next stage."

II. "Murderers to be Released"

Diplomatic correspondent Shimon Shiffer wrote on page one of Yediot Aharonot (February 6): "The Prime Minister tried to allay the concerns of bereaved parents with respect to the impending release of prisoners with 'blood on their hands.' 'We will not release the murderers of Israelis, period,' said Ariel Sharon. 'I am not going to Sharm el-Sheikh to hold negotiations on that issue.' Israel has agreed to release 900 prisoners without 'blood on their hands.' With that having been said, Sharon has asked to examine the possibility of releasing up to three murderers who have been imprisoned for more than 20 years and who are in poor health.... A meeting [February 5 of senior Israelis and Palestinians], which was held in a 'good atmosphere,' led to a decision to form a joint committee that would discuss the Palestinian request to release more prisoners. In other words: the crisis was postponed so as to allow the Sharm el-Sheikh summit to proceed as it should. In any event, said political officials, Israel has no intention of releasing murderers. 'The Palestinians want to force us into releasing prisoners who took part in terror attacks prior to the beginning of the process, even before the Palestinian Authority has taken the first practical steps to prove to our public opinion that they have undergone a fundamental change,' said a high-ranking political official."

III. "Egypt Will Strengthen Its Standing with the United States"

Arab affairs correspondent Jackie Hoogie wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (February 6): "In the summit due to take place two days from now, Cairo is trying to obtain its first political achievement in the current Intifada. In this way, Hosni Mubarak's people hope to increase their prestige among the Arabs, among their own people and in Washington, which has hung high hopes on them throughout the current conflict.... No less than this, Cairo is acting out of its own security needs. Egypt still remembers the beginning of the Intifada, when the bloody clashes in Ramallah were broadcast on Al-Jazeera in real time and incited the streets in Cairo and in Alexandria. There they know that the Israel-Palestinian conflict is an undermining factor in the Middle East as a whole. But there is a third factor in the Egyptian interest in calm on the ground. Since September 11, Cairo has been pressed to the wall, like other Arab countries, by the American demand to carry out reforms. Success in the Israel-Palestinian track could release much of the American pressure upon it."

IV. "The Terrorists Will Be Able to Rebuild their Strength"

Security and intelligence affairs commentator Amit Cohen wrote in Maariv (February 6): "The Sharm el-Sheikh summit brings the Palestinian terror organizations into a new era characterized by fear mixed with hope. After four years of struggle and attrition, for those organizations calm is not only a matter of desire but also a real necessity. Despite the heated rhetoric, the military capability of these organizations was greatly harmed during the Intifada, and now it amounts mostly to the ability to launch rockets. But this desire for calm, which stems from rational considerations, is neither absolute nor unequivocal.... The Palestinian organizations are not all cut from the same cloth, and each one of them has its own agenda. Some of them are more interested in calm while others, especially those under Hizbullah influence, will not bat an eyelash before sabotaging any agreement. But all of them have a shared goal: to keep their weapons and their military capability. They hope that the understandings reached with the Palestinian Authority in Gaza will allow them to do so despite the summit in Egypt."

IV. "Gaza and Jericho First -- Again"

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in Ha'aretz (February 6): "Israel and the Palestinians do not need another such incremental plan [as the Tenet and Mitchell documents], but rather a precise political definition of Sharon's declaration that Israel cannot continue to occupy the Palestinians and that there should be two states for the two peoples. Without any 'if' or condition. In the absence of such definition, there will be no strategic, historic or ideological significance in Sharon's readiness to withdraw from Gaza -- or in the flags waving at Sharm [el-Sheikh]."

VI. "Where Is the Sharm Conference Leading?"

Former editor-in-chief Moshe Ishon wrote in nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe (February 7): "It can be assumed that [Palestinian terror groups] will be in contact with the Egyptian terror organizations, which will supply them with weapons, under the nose of the Egyptian policemen.... The Sharm el-Sheikh summit is rather a vision that will serve external interests --- first of all, those of the summit's initiators, those of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak who has a particular interest in being the sponsor of the advancement of Israel-PA relations, and those of the Jordanian King who wants to closely follow the doings in his near surroundings, in order to be 'in on developments.' But this conference at this stage is very far from contributing to a process that would bring about a rapprochement on the way to an arrangement between Israel and the Palestinians."

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